

WINGED CHARIOT

by

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To N.:

without Whom there would
not have been the Time

WINGED CHARIOT

*'Is every subject apt for rambling rhyme?—
Some are intractable, and some sublime:
Only Eternity could master Time.*

*'As I sat by myself, I talked to myself,
And myself replied to me . . .'*

. . . Why this absurd concern with clocks, my friend?
Watching Time waste will bring no more to spend,
Nor can retard the inevitable end.

Yet when, the old wide staircase climbed once more,
Your bag in hand, you attain its second floor,
Turn the Yale key in lock, sigh, open the door

And into these familiar rooms you slip—
Where even Silence pauses, finger on lip—
Three emulous metal tongues you wake from sleep.

Do they suffice you? No, you pause again.
And (as if mechanisms made by men
The Truth could tell) you search each face. And then,

Though every minute of your life's your own,
Though here you are 'master' and at ease, alone—
You ring up *TIM*; consult the telephone.

*'I, whom thou seest
with boryloge in
bande,
Am named Tyme, the
lord of very howre.
. . .'*

The *telephone*! . . . Then, these precautions past,
Time made in Greenwich safely yours at last,
You set all three some fifteen minutes fast.

Psychopathist might guess the reason why
You indulge your wits in this mendacity.
Think *you* Man's 'enemy' is thus put by?

Think you so fleet a thing—that madcap hare
You daily waken from its nightlong lair—
Time, would consent such stratagems to share?

Or is it that you reassurance seek,
Deeming the Future will appear less bleak
Now that your clocks will 'go' a whole long week?

If Time's a stream—and we are told it's so,
Its peace were shattered if you check its flow;
What Naiad then ev'n fingertip would show?—
Her imaged other-world in ruins? . . . No:

Should once there haunt your too-attentive ear
A peevish pendulum, no more you'll hear
The soundless thunder of the distant weir

Which is Eternity. . . . Blest reverie:
When, from the serfdom of this world set free,
The self a moment rapt in peace may be;

Not void; but poised, serene, 'twixt praise and prayer,
Such as the flower-clocked woods and meadows share,
Lulled and fed only by day's light and air.

How punctual they! But to no *tic-toc* rune.
Theirs is an older code than 'May' and 'June';
As testifies 'Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon'; .
Airiest of ghosts, he goes to bed at noon!

Nimbused in his own song at dawn of day,
From earth's cold clods the skylark wings his way,
Into the sun-gilt crest of heaven to stray.

*... Jocond day stands
tiptoe on the mistie
mountaine's top . . .*

Housed in the dark of sleepy farms below,
At their own hour the cocks craned up to crow,
Their harems hearkening in obsequious row.

But wheel and barrel, ratchet, pawl, and spring?
Dear heart alive, how dull and dead a thing,
Compared with any creature on the wing,
Wherewith to measure even a glimpse of Spring.

Or, 'splitting seconds', to attempt to mete
The thrill with which a firefly's pinions beat.
Yes, or the languor, lingering and sweet,

When, lulled in the embraces of the sun,
The rose exults that her brief course is run
And heat-drowsed honey-bee has come; is gone.

Last night, at window idling, what saw I
Against the dusky summer greenery?—
Midges, a myriad, that up and down did fly,
Obedient to the breezes eddying by—
Sylphs scarcely of Time but of mere transiency:

An ovoid of intricate *winged* things, beautiful;
 As on some sea-breeze morning, sunned and cool,
 One may peer down upon a wavering shoal—
 Like eddying weed in ebb-tide's lap and lull—
 Of tiniest fish-fry in a rock-bound pool.

'... Among which the
 elephant is the greatest
 and commeth nearest in
 wit and capacitie to men
 ...'

The sage, slow elephant, night-scampering mouse,
 Snug-wintering tortoise in his horny house,
 To cark of frost and snow oblivious—
 Share they, think you, our sense of time with us?

And that old sly close-fisted cockatoo—
 Whose private life's a furtive *entre nous*,
 What temporal lens did *his* round eye peer through
 Whilst five kings reigned, and died—ere he died too?

Or, destined denizen of perpetual night,
 She, of the termites? Bloated, teeming, white,
 Huge and scarce motionable: yet her hosts' delight?

A-drowse in the ocean in an Arctic gale—
 What clock ticks Vespers to the suckling whale?
 And bids Aurora her heavenly face unveil?

'... Whannè thet
 Aprille with his
 sbourès sote
 The droghte of Marche
 bath percèd to the
 rote...'

What jewelled repeater edged the cuckoo's wing,
 Lovesick from Africa, to flit in Spring?
 Only one ding-dong name to say and sing—
 And dower our pipits with a fosterling?

Oh, what a tocsin has she for a tongue;
How stealthy a craft to jilt her eggs and young,
And put them out to nurse their whole lives long!—

This heiress of the primeval. How learned she
Time, season, mileage and the momentary?—
Two idle summers and a sundering sea;
And all small honest birds for enemy.

If ev'n we share no thought with our own kind
But what with voice, face, words may be defined,
How shall these quicksands of Nature be divined?
How fathom the innate by means of mind?

Reason strives on to bridge the vague abyss
Sev'ring the human from the languageless,
Its countless kinds and spheres of consciousness.

Insight delights in heavenly mysteries
And loves the childish game of 'Well, now, guess!'

See, now, that dwindling meteor in space
Which with its ruin illumed the night's hushed face:
As well *time* headlong Lucifer's disgrace!

*'... Love is from the
eye: but ... more by
glances than by full
gazings; and so for envy
and malice ...'*

And, fleeter ev'n than flickering lightning's glow,
Transfiguring hidden landscapes hushed below,
Imaged ideas through consciousness may flow:
Fruit raised from seed before ev'n leaf could show!

And feeling races thought. *One* stricken glance
At some, till then, scarce dreamed-of countenance—
The very soul's at gaze, as if in trance:

Poised like a condor in the Andean night,
When scarp and snowdrift, height to pinnaced height,
Transmute with wonder the first morning light.

So, in its innocence, love breaks upon the sight.

Hatred, dread, horror, too. As books relate:—
Thyestes when his own son's flesh he ate;
First stare at his iron cage of Bajazet;
And Œdipus—when parricide's his fate.

*' . . . By which there
sat an hory
Old aged Sire, with
bower-glasse in hand,
Hight Time . . . '*

Dogged morn till bed-time by its dull demands;
The veriest numskull *clock*-cluck understands,
Eked out by solemn gestures of its hands:

A subtler language stirs in whispering sands:

That double ovoid of translucent glass;
The tiny corridor through which they pass,
Shaping a crescent cone where nothing was,

Which mounts in exquisite quiet as the eye
Watches its myriad molecules slip by;
While, not an inch above, as stealthily,

*Those rocks minute
might fall of waters
be
Pouring themselves as
imperturbably
Into the crystal of their
central sea.*

A tiny shallowing on the surface seen
Sinks to a crater where a plane has been.
Could mutability be more serene?

Invert the fragile frame; and yet again
Daydream will rear a castle built in Spain.
'Time' measured thus is dewfall to the brain.

So, out of morning mist earth's flowers arise,
Reflecting tintless daybreak in the skies;
And, soon, the whole calm orient with its dyes.

*Water-clock, clepsydra,
candle-flame and day-
break.*

And even in bleak Winter one may go
Out of night's waking dreams and see the snow
In solemn glory on the fields below.

How happy he whose 'numbers' well as sweet,
Their rhythms in tacit concert with their feet,
And measure 'time', with no less hushed a beat. . . .

And clepsydra—the clock that Plato knew,
Tolling the varying hours each season through;
Oozing on, drop by drop, in liquid flow,
Its voice scarce audible, bell-like and low
As Juliet's communings with her Romeo.

More silent yet; pure solace to the sight—
The dwindling candle with her pensive light
Metes out the leaden watches of the night.
And, in that service, from herself takes flight.

Ah, after vigil through the hours called small,
Earth's dumb nocturnal hush enshrouding all,
When dread insomnia has the soul in thrall,
To see that gentle flame greet sunrise on the wall!

*' . . . The Sun's light
when he unfolds it,
Depends on the Organ
that beholds it . . . '*

Clocks fuss along, the lackeys of a spring;
Slaves of escapements; chime, but never sing;
Snow-soft as ghost-moth is *Time's* winnowing wing;
Though even to granite it some change must bring;

And to all else that's temporal. Which is yet
Nothing corrupt, but merely change. And that
On goal supreme—through change—its course may set.

And ev'n if ruin Nature's face betray,
Time was not cause thereof, but mere decay,
Slow as renewal, wending its wonted way.

When restless thought lulls low, as winds may cease
On dune and marram-grass, and there is peace,
The self becalmed may be by a loneliness

That pays no heed to time; and may attain
What Reason mocks at as the 'intense inane';
Though little one covet to come back again.

Séa-gulls home this way in the setting sun,
When—lowered lamp—his winter is begun.
He dyes their plumes with his vermilion,
As, in their idling squadrons, they wing on.

Under this roof, when, motionless and dense,
Silence beleaguers every nerve and sense,
Self-solitude is made the more intense.

Head turned on shoulder then, the straining ear
Dreads and yet conjures up the voice of Fear.
An inward sentry cries, 'Who's listening here?' . . .

Could fancy alone in this old thick-walled house,
When nothing stirs, not even a wainscot mouse,

Thus haunt mere matter with the ominous?
And these misgivings rouse?

Midnight beyond that shutter broods. The rain
Its lully whispers in the towering Plane
Whose presence canopies my complete domain—

Whose every twig breathes freshness in the air,
And mottled boughs five-fathom tresses wear,
In May-time dangling like a Siren's hair.

Phantoms¹ draw nearer then of the unseen.
They pause in silence at the entering-in;
Eyes, raiment, wraithlike faces, vapour-thin—

Hedded perceptions of a secret mind
Less closely to the physical confined:
Like flowers in their beauty to the blind.

And every soul draws ever toward its own
Viewless associates as it journeys on;
Is never less alone than when alone.

When, then, I leave this haunt, as soon I may,
Will not some homesick relic of me stay—
Unseen, unheard? And while—what? . . . *Time*, away!?

Hearken² the heart must if it seem to share
A rarer presence yet than light or air;
Visage serene, calm brows, and braided hair—

*' . . . In the Deserts of
Africa, you shall meet
oftentimes with fairies
appearing in the shape
of men and women, but
they vanish quite away
like phantastical delu-
sions . . . '*

*' Are they shadows that
we see? . . . '*

More real even than what imagining
Into the confines of the eye may bring;
Tranquil as seraph, with half-folded wing.

Would I her scholar were in poetry!
No toil in vain then. Nothing to weary me.
Alas, these halting rhymes—that cannot be.

Yet, when, a child, I was content to rove
The shingled beach that I was Crusoe of,
All that I learned there was akin to love.

The glass-clear billow toppling on the sand,
Sweet salt-tanged air, birds, rock-drift—eye, ear, hand;
All was a language love could understand.

Yet there was mystery too: those steps of stone—
In the green paddock where I played alone—
 Cracked, weed-grown,
Which often allured my hesitant footsteps down

To an old sun-stained key-holed door that stood,
The guardian of an inner solitude,
Whereon I longed but dreaded to intrude;
Peering and listening as quietly as I could.

There, as I knew, in brooding darkness lay
The waters of a reservoir. But why—
In deadly earnest, though I feigned, in play—
Used I to stone those doors; then run away,
Listening enthralled in the hot sunny day

To echo and rumour; and that distant sigh,
As if some friend profaned had made reply,—
When merely a child was I?

Nor is this *love* a jewel in one plane.
It many facets has: mind, soul; joy, pain:
And even a child may to this truth attain.

*'... Love is a malady
apart, the sign
And astrolabe of
mysteries Divine...'*

Secret and marvel too the body is,
And exquisite means of earth's infrequent bliss;
But love foresees Love's everlastingness.

Had passion voice, why then the strange delight
Ev'n an hour may bring would pæans indite;
And, seeing no words these mercies could requite,
Age pines, in talk, to skirt the infinite;
As birds sing wildlier when it draws towards night.

She whom I vision many masks has worn,
Since, in this world, half-alien, I was born;
And every one has left me less forlorn.

'Woe'er she be ...'

And though pure solitude may be utmost grace,
And leagues from loneliness, a loved-one's face
Quadruples happiness in any place.

Time shared then's not time halved. Yet if it be
Spent in that loved one's fleeting company,
It flies even swiflier than the caught set free.

Leaving an empty cage? . . . May heaven forbear!
Blank absence then would greet us everywhere—
A *wilderness*, called Time, bereft and bare
Be the slow tedium left however fair.

' . . . *There mournful
cypress grew in
greatest store,
And trees of bitter gall,
and Heben sad,
Dead-sleeping Poppy,
and black Hellebore,
Cold coloquintida . . .*

However fair But cracked may be love's bells;
Mirage its lode-star, and disaster else;
As (countless cantos) this old fable tells:—

THE PALACE OF TIME

' A self-sick wanderer, in the leprous light
Of death-drear forest at the fall of night
Came out on no less derelict a sight:—

' Its walls slant-shadowed by the dwindling shine
Of day, a mansion—bleached, gaunt, saturnine,
With windows gaping 'gainst the evening green
As though by fire-flames charred their mullions had been.

' It called to mind a dream he once was in. . . .

' That broken turret; fallen roof—were these
The prey of *age*? Weather's slow ravages?
Or sudden blasting stroke of destiny's?

' When what is beautiful is that no more,
Except as memory may its grace restore,
One's very heart stands listening at the door;

' And self-arraigned, the fatal charge must meet:
"Wilful neglect; betrayal; self-deceit."
And no defender left to answer it.

*. . . And we watered
our horses at the pool of
Siloam . . .*

' What though once-Eden now is sour morass,
The abode of croaking frogs and venomous flies, .
Yet, which of us, alas,
Can not in his own visage darkly trace
That blighted Seraph's face?

'And when, companionless, at night we fare,
Ascending our own private corkscrew stair,
Is't never Darkness that awaits us there? . . .

'Down the chill chace he paced . . . Where once the deer
Browsed in the dappling sun devoid of fear,
And supped the conduit's waters rippling clear;

'Where wooed the turtle-dove; and all dark long
Creatures nocturnal in its woods would throng,
And nightingales mock passion with their song;

'Now effigies, in guise of life, of stone—
Grief, woe, despair their broken faces on,
Some as though smiling—in the dusk-line shone.
All else seemed foundered in oblivion.

'And *Silence* mouldered there; aloof, alone.
Ev'n should the sun now shine and gild the tips
Of motionless cypresses in this wide ellipse,
His beams were shorn of power, as in eclipse.

'And formless shapes of rock that seemed to brood
On lost primordial secrets, crouched or stood,
Lifeless, yet menacing, margining the wood.

'Yet no thing living showed, save where it seemed
The stone-work of a dial vaguely gleamed;
And there, though not asleep, one lay and dreamed.

'Sickened with expectation, close he drew,
The sun-warmed turf beneath his feet; and knew

' . . . *The lady rode,
True Thomas ran,
Until they came to a
water wan;
O it was night and nae
delight,
And Thomas wade
aboon the knee.*

'It was dark night, and
nae starnlight,
And on they waded
lang days three,
And they heard the
roaring o a flood,
And Thomas a waefou
man was he . . .'

Eyes glassy-cold as serpent's watched their thin lids through—
Lids fringed with gilt, and eyes of sleep-glazed blue.

'Palace of Time, he had heard these ruins named;
Once seat of Pride and Pomp, but long ill-famed,
Since Pride had fallen, and venging fire had flamed.

' . . . Side by side,
jarring no more,
Day and night side by
side,
Each by a doorless door,
Motionless sit the
bridegroom and bride
On the Dead-Sea-
shore'

'She, then, was Witchcraft, and on evil bent,
Foe of the abandoned, lost, and malcontent,
And doomed to ruin whithersoever they went?

'The tarnished dial, its gnomon shorn away,
Worn steps, now shattered, with cankering lichen grey,
Told of phantasmal night, past hope of day.

'A lunar dial? Astarte's wizardry?
Secret, adored, cold, wanton in perfidy;
The bygone haunt of ancient revelry?

'And he, this wanderer? What fate was his?' . . .
So runs this ancient legend of dole and Dis;
Whereof no end's recorded beyond this.

'Like one who, victim of a malady,
Having its name, yet knows not what it be,
Seeking for light in some old dictionary,
Meets *caput mortuum*'s cold scrutiny . . .'

* * *

' . . . Feed apace then,
greedy eyes, On the
wonder you behold! . . .'

Love is life's liberty. 'Time' will snare remain
Until to peace of mind and heart we attain,
And paradise, whose source it was, come back again.

Inscrutable Nature in her own slow way
Seems even in labour to be half in play;
With hyssop in wall will dally a whole long summer's day.

She takes her time: and, the rich summer gone,
Through autumn mists and winter cold dreams on
Till, Phoenix-like, her beauty is re-won.

Yes, and with what élan her creatures live,
How in their kinds, crafts, busyness they thrive!
The tribute lovely, wanton, odd they give

*. . . How often comes
to memory—silly
sooth!—
That tiny bird I took to
be a moth . . .*

To all that nurtures them—the viewless air,
The Sun in dazzling bounty circling there,
Rivulet, bosoming hill and woodland fair.
Her faintest change each in its kind must share;

Unique, exultant beings of infinite zest,
Preying or preyed on, and supremely blest
In that by human cares they are unoppressed.

How ponder quickly enough on what one sees
To realise this beauty's mutableness?—
Its range is one of infinite degrees.

*' . . . If things of Sight
such heavens be,
What heavens are those
we cannot see? . . . '*

Stir not your gaze, but let it so remain,
In all its quietude, in eye and brain;
Of its own nature it will soothe, and sain.

A plain wood panel will the whole long day
In light and shadow change with every ray.

No eye will *watch* that loveliness away.
Alas, that nothing can less briefly stay!

The moment is annulled—however dear—
Sooner than raptured tongue can utter, ‘*See, it’s here!*’
Shrill from his midden-top whoops Chanticleer,
Scratches—and priceless gewgaws disappear.

*Nor is some strange-
ness absent from the
seen,
However usual, if there
intervene
The unageing mind. Its
hidden life has been
This edge of contrast to
the day’s routine.*

Jasmine, and hyacinth, the briar rose
Steep with their presence a whole night; nor close:
Time with an infinite gentleness through them flows.

Fantastic growths there are too—flower and scent—
In earth’s occult alembic strangely blent,
To some obscure decree obedient,
And as of sorcerous or divine descent.

Mist, dew and rainfall keep these trystings sweet,
And light, with ghosting shadow, dogs our feet;
Day in, day out, thrums on heart’s secret beat,
Calmly refusing to conform with it.

While none of these then can ‘pure time’ bespeak,
Which every eager intellect should seek,
Each mind its time-piece has. And that’s unique.

‘... Time was: Time
is: Time is not...’

Time was: Time is: Time is not, runs the rune.
Hasten then. Seize that *is*, so soon begone.
As well subtract the music, keep the tune!

For no 'time' ever yet in storage lay,
Sun-ambered, weathered, sweet as new-mown hay,
Waiting mind's weaving—Rumpelstiltskin's way:—

Time 'real'; time rare; time wildfire-fleet; time tame;
Time telepathic, out of space, and aim;
Time starry; lunatic; ice-bleached; of flame;
Dew-transient, yet immutably the same;
Meek-mild as chickweed in a window-frame;

Tardy as gathering dust in rock-hewn vault;
Fickle as moon-flake in a mirror caught
At pause on some clear gem's scarce-visible fault . . .

And how moves Time in triple darkness hid,
Where—mummied 'neath his coffered coverlid—
Sleeps on the Pharaoh in his pyramid:
Time disincarnate—and that sharp-nosed head?

Even though suave it seem as narded oil,
Fatal to beauty it is, and yet its foil.
It is of all things mortal the indifferent soil.

Eye scarce can tell where, the whole spectrum through,
Orange with yellow fuses, green with blue;
So Time's degrees may no less diverse show,
Yet every variant be its fraction true.

Grey with their dust, cribbed in with facts and dates,
On founded centuries the historian waits.
Ashes in balance, he sifts, weighs, meditates.

*' . . . And over them
Arachne high did lift
Her cunning web, and
spread her subtle net.
...'*

Unlike the astronomer in the heavens at play,
Through Time defunct, not Space, he elects to stray.
Stars of a magnitude his chosen prey,
He spends less leisure on its Milky Way,
Man's millions in its *Coalsack* stowed away.

Much he may look for which he is like to find;
And to its worst may be at length resigned:
'The follies, crimes, misfortunes of mankind.'

Transmuting facts into his truth, rejecting none,
Rapt in seclusion, he toils gravely on;
Crypt, arch, pier, buttress, roof; and fickle moon—
A noble structure when the building's done:
But of wild coarse sweet positive *life*, no breath—not one.

Yet, let disciple read him with delight—
In Time interred, a fellow-anchorite—
It is as though into the gloom of night
Scapegrace Aladdin chanced to come in sight,
And rubbed his lamp. . . . The change is infinite.
Shadows take bodies; blood begins to beat;

And through this inky ichor softly rills
The Jinnee's magic, and each cranny fills
With scene, thought, action, as the context wills;
And very life itself his record thrills.

So too in fane of Time's memorial stones—
In crisscross framework of poor human bones,
Isis, Baal, Ormuzd on their scaling thrones—
The scutcheons glimmer of the great Unknowns . . .
And now—their withered *Once!*

They touch us to the quick, these far events,
Looming beyond mere mortal instruments;
Omens of destiny, of Providence:
Their dust long fall'n, but not their influence.

But no rune's yet recalled Time's lost and gone—
Only its ghosts. And theirs is *dies non*.
All is in flux; nor stays, but changes on.
No sunrise hymns the self-same orison.

The unique's unique—assort it as we please;
Every oak's acorns will sprout differing trees.
So many lives, as many mysteries.

Nor do the morning stars together sing
One only *Laus* to *Alleluia's* ring,
When shout the sons of God before their King.

Were moments seeds, we then therein might say
What hidden kind, hue, value, beauty lay,
Virtue and quality. But, these away,

Theirs only quantity, mere measurement,
Sans substance, pattern, form, shape, taste and scent—
Flimsier than bubble, and more transient.

Should, then a Stranger from another Sphere
Enquire, '*This Time, of which so much I hear?*
Light—dark; beat—cold; void—solid: these are clear;
But TIME? What is it? Show me some, Monsieur!'

What should we choose for semblance? A flake of snow?
A beach-brine bubble? A tiny shell or two?

... *Sup humbly. All
things compassed,
near or far,
Are—for ourselves—
but what we think
they are:
The Web of Seeming
holds us prisoner...*

'... *O tell me mair,
young man, she said,
This does surprise me
now;
What country bae ye
come frae?
What pedigree are you?*
...

Poised in the sun, pure diamond of dew?
Or whisper, '*Look! a clock! Now watch Time flow;*
It's a Machine, you see. It makes it go.'

Bland face; sly jerking hands: staring he'd stay,
Dumbly astonished. And then turn, and say,
Closer to Nothingness could nothing stray!
And now, pray, make Time flow the other way!

'Moments', like sun-discs on a rippled sea,
No heed paid to them merely cease to be,
Leaving no trace of their identity:

Mere litter stowed in Time's packed Lumber-Room—
Moth, spider, mildew, rust, star-raftered gloom;
Vast as moon-crater, silent as the tomb,
Not even a death-watch for a pendulum.

But mark Self summing up what's really his—
Glimpses of childhood, friendship, bygone bliss—
Those fumbling fingers, that impassioned kiss!
Dear beyond words are relics such as these.

And who, in his dark hours, dulled, overcast—
At envy, hatred, malice, cant aghast—
Would not abscond a while from this worn temporal waste;
Into another world of being haste,
And, maybe, meet the idolised at last?
Chaucer? Keats? Marvell? Wyatt? Drayton?—Oh
Any long-lov'd and true enthusiast!

Lost in that company the spirit may range
A rarer, deeper, closer interchange
In the imagination, rich and strange—
A Mariana in a moated grange.

... *Some nameless
stuff...*

At shut of dusk, 'neath timbered roof, worn stone,
Dark at the window-glass, and all life gone,
In hush of falling dust and mouldering bone,

Inward, still inward let the round ear lean! . . .
Time's not of moments made. It's hidden in
Some nameless stuff that oozes in between

Yet, friend, (once more), when you are here again,
Do you *possess* this quiet? The Silence drain?
Give thanks for boons withheld from other men?
A Paternoster breathe—and then count ten?

'... "I stand like one
That long bath ta'en
a sweet and golden
dream,
I am angry with my-
self now that I wake"
...'

No, like some light-o'-love, away you chase
Straight to that *chit-chat* in the china case
You bought in Woodbridge—'Fitz's' native place.
Then comes 'Susanna', with her prim round face;

Next your much-prized old dial, inlaid with brass,
Sun-pendulum'd in gilt. And next

Alas,
Still will the hours for you melt much too fast!

Not for the world that I would mock at what
Have 'timed' the countless godsend of my lot;
And still might miss, most earthly things forgot.

'... *Keeping time, time,
time
To a sort of runic
rhyme ...!*

Even as 'child of Paules', when brood I would
At thunder of its bell—Night: Solitude—
(And slow-coach was I always, doomed to plod),
I must have fallen in love with clocks for good.

Tompion, Bréguet, Knibb, Ellicot, Cole, Quare,
How featly chime the names of those who were
Masters in this sweet art; famed everywhere:
Timepiece-artificers beyond compare.
And each of sovereign Harrison the heir,
With his supreme chronometer.

Bell-tinkling *watch*-craft too, tiny as bees,
Set bezel-wise, may match great clocks with ease—
And, no less punctually, the Pleiades.

And should you wish to meditate; then, where
A grandpaternal timepiece crowns the stair,
Pause as you go to bed; to listen; and share
The unhastening monologue it ponders there.

'... *But at my back I
always bear
Times winged Chariot
drawing near ...'*

To Julius and Gregory be praise,
Who bade the Calendar amend its ways.
But when from such 'dull durance fancy strays—
How beautiful is the procession of the days.

With each cold clear pure dawning to perceive
The Sun's edge earlier; and, at fall of eve,
When the last thrush his song is loth to leave,
To mark its latening, however brief!

Nor is the marvel of his burning rose,
Bronze, saffron, azure, discontinuous;
He takes his splendour with him as he goes.

So thought the poet, Fabre d'Églantine,
(When his sweet France had licked the platter clean).
Brumaire Nivôse Vendémiaire—things *seen*
In Terra's tilt, from virgin white to green:

Snow Rain Wind Bud Flower Grape
 make richer sense
Than our pastiche of dead-alive events—
Janus to Juno, and December thence.

Sick unto death must Woden be of Thor;
Deaf Saturn yells at Frig, '*We have met before! . . .*'
Sun unto Moon, '*Would God weeks were no more;*
Or that to Man He would his wits restore!' . . .

Still: dangling keys 'twixt clumsy finger and thumb,
You bustle your punctual way from room to room,
And into senseless tongues transform the dumb.

*' . . . And yonder al
before us lye
Deserts of vast Eter-
nity . . . '*

You wind the docile things—run-down or not;
You set them fast, as cautious mortals ought;
And are at once in TIM's sly coggery caught.

Yet hopes, joys, prayers will tell much more that is
In this strange world of ours of bale and bliss.
Ev'n specks of sand secrete eternities:
Sit down then; listen to their confidences.

Think you, indeed, benumbed by grief or pain,
Or lost in some dread labyrinth of the brain,
An earth-bound clock will set you free again?

Why pause not *now*? To ponder, unoppressed?
The halcyon come again. And in your breast
The brief Elysium of a soul at rest?

An opening flower, night's furthest nebulae
In mind supreme must be contemporary.
In one same moment they might cease to be.

And that faint eastern star—'light-years' gone by
Its beams have ranged which pierce the evening sky,
To find their haven in a human eye;
On human heart to shed tranquillity.

And though with his ingenious Optick Glass
The mind of man may map the wastes of Space,
Thence he may yet return in joy to trace
The light of welcome in a human face.

Merely material things hark back again
To their unknown, unknowable origin;
As, to death-darkening gaze, the world of men.

*Those rocks green-capped, round which the sea-mews whine,
Reared up aloft, wide-gullied from the land,
Are no more stable in the wash of Time
Than lost enchanted palace in the sand.*

*Sun-bleached, slim, delicate bones of wings at rest,
And whispering thrift that trembles in the blast
Tell of the transiency of earthly dust
To which even adamant must return at last.*

*There falls a night, of myriads gone by;
A starless tempest raves; the wildering sea
Storms in. And daybreak lifts a heavy eye
For what has gane its gait, and ceased to be.*

So, to day's eye, destruction shows—void space
Where towered massive majesty and grace,
Coped by the foam-flowers of sea-wilderness.

Engirdling the great World these waters flow,
To charred wan moon obeisant, to and fro.
But swang she nearer? . . . Chaos and overthrow:
Which of our marvels then were left for show

*' . . . So did this noble
Empire waste,
Sunk by degrees from
glories past . . . '*

Of all Man's pomp and power? Of aught achieved
Whereby his reign on earth might be believed;
Or his superb effrontery be conceived?

That he—of all God's creatures niggling-nice,
Yet seamed with pride, conceit, and racked with vice;
Dove-gentle; saintlike; evil as cockatrice—

Should thus have edged his way from clime to clime
In a mere millionth of terrestrial 'time',
And talked of Truth, of Wisdom, the Sublime!

Once, a bold venturer, perched on his '*Machine*',
Broke out (Man's history over) on a scene
Of Sun stark still, and leprous sea brine-green.
And, for sole witness of life's Might-have-been,
A tentacled crustacean, vast, obscene!

Now—in a patch of sea-turf may arise
Low mounds secreting the packed enterprise
Of empires past all sapience to assize—
The latest of a myriad dynasties.

And when the heat of summer wells into
Their chambered queens, then their dark galleries through
Swarm they with their sheened courtiers up into the blue—

To glut the sea-gulls, or creep back to shed
Their cheating gnawed-off pinions; or, instead,
To blacken for miles the sea-sands with their dead . . .

Time? May God help us! Better a few years
Of casual change than slavery such as theirs:
Where all are pitiless, and none shed tears.

Once was a hidden country, travellers say,
(Due East-by-West of North-by-South it lay),
Designed to serve as a Utopia;
Where all things living lived the selfsame way.

Its flowers were scant and scentless (like our musk);
One weight of ivory was each tooth and tusk;
On every nut there swelled the same-sized husk;
Noonday to night there loomed perpetual dusk.

Fate was appalled. Her See-Saw would not stir.
Man sat dead-centre and grimaced at her.
Her prizes? None could shine where none could err;
So every artless dunce was a philosopher . . .

Still in long clothes was I when leaⁿèd men
Tracked down the 'atom'. They as busy had been
On evidences of a distant When
That mite had ape for kith and kin. Amen.

Once did the tiny shrews lemurs beget;
And they the tarsier, starred with eyes of jet;
And that the wistful little marmoset:
At length came Man; with Fate for martinet.
And *Time*? How could it else but aid, abet?

Still, there was other route. One no less free:
A virgin, visionary Earth to see,
Seed of supreme potentiality
Of man with God and love at peace to be.

Were life a poem we have to improvise
(Facing the stubbornest of all prosodies)
An Epilogue might close the enterprise;
And all else seem a mere parenthesis.
Which—when Earth's 'actual' thins—we know it is.

As when in pangs of death a hermit lay—
Cave, rill, rock, leaf-shagged tree—and from the sky,
Blue above sand, a seraph hovered nigh,

*'... This infant world
has taken long to
make,
Nor hast Thou done
with it, but mak'st it
yet,
And wilt be working
on when death has
set
A new mound in some
churchyard for my
sake ...'*

And set his foot there. Like a god's, his face
Shone in the shadow, smiling in its grace,
And shed infinity in that narrow space.

Cry on the dead:—‘*Beseech thee! wake! Arise!*’ . . .
Impassive waxen visage, fast-sealed eyes
Sunken past speculation or surmise:
And, for response, not even the least of sighs.

How, then, can he we knew and loved be *there*?
Whose every thought was courtesy; whose one care
To show his friendship, and to speak us fair: ‘

Gentle and steadfast. Why, but three days since
We talked of life; its whither and its whence;
His face alert with age's innocence.
He smiled an *au revoir* when he went hence

Oh, ev'n should folly bring Man's world to woe,
Out of its ashes might a sweeter show.
And what of the life beyond, whereto we go?

Even were that of this a further lease
It yet might win to a blest state that is
Past thought—transcending scope of clock-time's bliss.
More simple, passionate, and profound than this.

Dazed by mere ‘Space’ void-universes-wide,
Where All-that-is has Nought-that-thinks for bride,
The mind rebels. It's Reason's suicide

That dream I had of old—when, gazing sheer
Down verge of an abysm of stagnant air,
Senses as sharp as insect's, I could hear
Time's Ocean, sighing on the shingle there:

A whispering menace that chilled brain and blood;
Enormous, formless. Agonised I stood,
Tongueless with horror of what this forbode;

Yet lured on ever closer to its brim;
The night-long plunge; the gulf, vast, vaporous, dim;
That vault of Nothingness, the Nought of dream.

Ah, well I knew the doom in wait for me—
Lost in that quagmire of Sleep's treachery—
Drowning, to thirst for death; but never die. . . .

Yet never fiend that trod Earth's crust could break
Man's steadfast soul while he was ware and wake,
Though God Himself should seem him to forsake—
Unless, 'twould seem, such fiend took human shape.

And never in Matter, surely, shall we find
Aught that is wholly inconsonant with a Mind
That thus conceived, evoked, informed its kind?
Else to forlorn Unreason we are confined.

Why, then, so closely pry? Consider, too—
Despite the earth-bound lenses we look through—
At exquisite equipoise rests what is true;
'All knowledge is remembrance' . . . 'Nothing's new.'

Oh, with what joy an ignorant heart may steal
From dry-as-dust abstractions to a 'real',
Where what we think is blent with what we feel.

That star, which through the window spills its ray
On sheet and pillow when in dream we stray—
That's not a myriad light-years far away!

No further (if mere distance be at all),
Than is the ultramicroscopical—
The goddess who electrons has in thrall.

Will ever indeed have tongue the power to tell
All ev'n a taper discloses in a well?
If Truth's it be, it's clean impossible.

Thick too as motes that in a sunbeam drift
Day's dreamlike images may swirl and shift
Too instantaneous for clock to sift.

Strive then to give them words. The wits fall numb;
Into a *cul-de-sac* thought seems to come;
A timeless semi-conscious vacuum.
And how long wait will they a lip that's dumb?

No more than stream till it is stayed in ice
Will with its waters glass the same scene twice
Can we recall Time's content as it flies.

Clear be its well-spring, then; its tide slow, deep.
Rich in reflection, let the quiet mind steep.
Peace comes but seldom, let not one crumb slip.

Transient the loved may be. The ripple flows;
So is perfected—falls the wreathed musk-rose.
'Tis his own rainbow with earth's traveller goes.

One unique journey his. His dial tells
His own sun's passive shadow, nothing else;
Though nought its splendour, when it shines, excels.

And if in the familiar, prized, serene—
Green hill, and woodland, pool in twilight seen,
House we have loved, shared, treasured, talked, been
happy in—
Our wonder and delight have always been,

Strange paradox it were, if it were true,
That, when the sight goes, then the see-er goes too.
What? For *that* finis a long life's ado?

Whence was that whispering—as if secretly?
A scarce-heard utterance, followed by a sigh:—
'Some there may be who when they die, they die.'
'And their whole world goes with them?' came reply.

*'Why, it might chance he leaves some tale behind
Whose radiant aim had left him all but blind,
Which yet none living could for reader find.
So evanescent may prove all mankind:
Though ghost with ghost still commune; mind with mind.'*

Yet, even if, dying, we should cease to be,
However brief our mortal destiny,
Were this for having *lived* outrageous fee?

For having loved, laughed, talked, dreamed, toiled, endured
our dree;

Ev'n cut *one* birthday-cake—with candles three?

That were to mere good sense clean contrary;
As well might once-green skeleton leaf upbraid its
Springtide tree.

Days there may come that wish there were no morrow,
No night of weeping, nor a dawn of sorrow;
Yet only out of bonds as bleak and narrow,
Can we the rapture of forgiveness borrow.

Swift-falling flower, slowly fretting stone
Clock on unheeded those who lie alone,
Whose quiet dust in darkness may dream on
The more serenely if they peace have won—

And in earth's sempiternity awake
The annual yew-buds that above them break,
And to the winds their incense-pollen shake.

Strange prodigy is Man. Of so short stay,
Yet linked with Vega and with Nineveh.
Time—Space: what matters it how far away,
In this strange Hall of Mirrors through which we stray?

Life's dearest mysteries lie near, not far.
The least explored are the familiar;
As, to a child, the twinkling of a star;
As, to ourselves, ourselves—who know not what we are!

Subtler than light, *Time* seems our eyes to steep
With beauty unearthly as things age; and slip
Into the timelessness Lethean of Sleep.

The Trumpet sounds. The listening arise;
Host beyond host the angelic hierarchies
Dome with their glory the once-empty skies

'*An Old Wives' tale* . . .'? We smile; or yawn: refuse
Credence to fables which no more amuse
Wits braced and pregnant with the morning's News.

'Tale' if it be, 'twas by no idiot told
Of some far Golden Age to an Age of Gold,
Whose chief pursuit concerns the bought and sold.

Would you your cranium case of clockwork were?
Its mainspring cleverness, its parts all 'spare';
Its key mere habit, yet each tick, *Beware!*?

Better than that, it were to stay the child
Before 'time' tamed you. When you both ran wild
And to heaven's *Angelus* were reconciled.

Host of all sun-blest things by nature his,
His mind imagines all on earth he sees,
His heart a honeycomb of far resemblances—
Ere fall the shadows, shams, obliquities.

The streams of air that throng his timeless sky
Toss the green tree-tops, and not even sigh

In the slim nid-nod grass that seeds near by,
Or rob by a note his blackbird's lullaby.
And when the day breathes cold, and winds are high,
To watch the autumnal jackdaws storm the sky!—
Meal-dusty polls, glossed plumage, speedwell eye—
Ere cold of winter come; and Spring draw nigh.

And though the beauty both of bird and song
May pass unheeded in the press and throng,
In its own small for-ever it lived long.

Not by mere age, renown, power, place, or pride
The heart makes measurement. Its quickening tide
Found once its egress in a wounded side:

Love is its joyful citadel. Its moat
A lake of lilies, though they wither not.
Beyond our plummet's reach lies where they float.

Yet may we sound that deep as best we can,
And, unlike dazed Narcissus, there may scan
Reflections of the inestimable in man:

All that of truth is in its mirror shown;
And, far beneath, the ooze life feeds upon,
Whose *rot* breeds evil, jealousy and scorn.
A nature merciless, a mind forsworn.

Love on; and faithfully. Death hath his pace.
No past inveigles him. That timeless face
Ev'n of the future shows no faintest trace;

But what far-beckoning mysteries hide there,
In those phantasmal sockets, bleak and bare?
Visions frequent their dark; but not *Despair*.

Mere fictions? . . . Still, how sweet upon your ear
Was always, '*Once upon a time, my dear . . .*'—
Robbing both night and morrow of all fear.

Ev'n this enchantment soon as come was gone
To swell that 'once'. And so you morrowed on.
Is *that* why clocks set 'fast' you choose to con?

Just to seduce the dotard with his glass
By damming back his sands a while? Alas,
A specious trick, poor soul! But—let it pass.

Dog in the manger, Master Yea-and-Nay,
You pine for time to hasten, yet bid it stay—
Creature of contraries for ever at play.

As seems the moon—when clouds in legion lie—
'Gainst the wild wind to race; till, suddenly,
Her full effulgence floods a tranquil sky.
And both are good—wind, and tranquillity—
That vault of Silence, and the hoot-owl's cry.

And what worse fate were there than the decree:—
'*Thy days shall pass in changeless impotency—
Sand, salt, grey mist, stark rock and wash of sea—
Thy one conundrum, How to cease to be?*'

Only the impotent grieve—‘*The hours drag by.*’
Self is their burden. That’s a bond-slave’s cry.
Will it be *clock*-time, think you, when you die?
Or body’s zero; soul’s eternity?

Immeasurable aeons ere the sun
Sprayed out the planets, as a fish its spawn,
Clotho her fatal tissue had begun

Which lured you to this instant. And, know this:
Eve fell; the King looked up; cock crew; ywis
Woe, of a moment, was the traitor’s kiss.

All in a moment Eros shoots, and flies;
Corroding hatred gazes from the eyes;
The heart is broken. And the loved one dies.

No wonder, then, that soon as day’s begun,
Shadow foretells the course that it will run—
Cast by that radiant Prince of Time, the Sun;

Whom our dull clouds conceal; whom Earth forsakes,
And skulking denizens of the dark awakes.
It is her own withdrawal midnight makes.

Journeying swiftly on, she makes no stay;
‘A thousand years are but as yesterday’:
By candle Alfred set his hour to pray:
And, once, Man merely Sunned his life away.

Now we devices have so accurate
They tell the exigent enquirer what

Sheer millionth of a second he is at—
Or *was*, if one must really get it pat.

Would they might pause instead! . . .

Or slow, or fast,
Time's falling waters grieve,
This cannot last!

In mere momentum merging with the Past.

Back to our homely hour-glass let us go.
It tells us nothing till we wish it to;
And, even then, in dosage smooth and slow

•

Ponder the problem how we may, and can,
Time has enigma been since Time began,
The subtlest of confusions known to Man;

One no less baffling than it is to say
How came what we call Consciousness our way;
Whence flows the wellspring that keeps life in play;
Or, this dilemma solved, where then 'twill stray.

Where Mind is not, there Time would cease to be,
All expectation, hope, and memory;
Without a warp how weave a tapestry?

Let there be Chaos! was the first decree;
And one of infinite potentiality.

Apart then from the whither and the whence—
What *is* this 'time' but term to mark our sense

Of life's erratic sequence of events,
Though not their scope and range or consequence;
And we its centre and circumference?

They fleet along, as if by Fancy led,
Like flotsam on a brook, and we its bed—
The world without; the mind-world, in our head—
Urgent, sweet, shattering; forlorn, half-dead.

Three score and ten . . . Like leaves our lives unfold;
Hid in the telling moves the tale untold.
It is not wishing makes the heart grow cold.
And saddest of all earth's clocks is Others growing old:
The silvering hair that once was palest gold.

Watched pots are loth to boil, old bodies prate;
Snail-slow moves *everything* for which we wait:
The craved-for news; the kiss; the loved-one, late;
The laggard footfall at the fast-locked gate;
Yes—and a dead man's shoes, if that's our bait.

All that we long for, languish, pray for—Oh,
Never moved Car of Juggernaut so slow.
It comes—and hours into mere moments flow:
For even on Innocents' Day the blade may show
Of Snowdrop piercing through the crudded snow,
Snell though the starving blasts of winter blow.
It's bidden, and wills it, so.

But drifts of living, eventless, feelingless,
Lapse out unmemoried into nothingness.
Instant and timeless are our ecstasies.

And should events be swift, wild, urgent—then
No cranny shows for clock-time to creep in;
Life leaps to action, even the sun unseen.

Not less remote that tick when one's engrossed
In arduous treasure-hunt on Fiction's coast,
Called El Dorado: with one's self for ghost.

Thus celled—aurelia in its cocoon—
In thrall of this strange make-believe, alone,
Phantoms appear, in seeming flesh and bone.
They breathe; live; move; they *are*—one's very own.
Scene, story and intent web softly on . . .

You pause; look up: '*Good heavens; the morning's gone!*'

And as for Coleridge, spellbound with his *Rime*—
Whose music, radiance and strangeness seem
Real as the simulacra of a dream—

Four several 'times' he mingled in his theme:—
His clock's, his mind's, the ship's that had no name,
The Sun of genius', regnant over them. . . .
And *Kubla Khan*?—when one from Porlock came?

Throughout the day throbs on this inward loom;
Though little heeded be its whirr and thrum.
Comes then the dark. And, senses lulled and numb,
The sleeper lies; defenceless, passive, mum.

Hypnos awaits him, and what dreams may come;
The Actual faint as rumour in a tomb.

Stealthy as snow, vicissitudes drift by—
Watched, without pause, by some strange inward eye—
Lovely; bizarre; inane; we know not why!
Nor what of Space and Time they occupy,
Who's their deviser, or whence his puppetry.

Once, dreamer dreamed (his candle just puffed out)
He'd travelled half earth's oceans round about,
Stormed-on, becalmed; wild chance-work and unsought;
To sea-wind's whine, surf's hiss, and dolphin's snort
Days, weeks, his ship had sailed from port to port;

Sweeping the tides for wonders she had run
A moon's five phases; whirlwind and typhoon;
Islands galore

At length, his voyaging done,
He woke—to find his wick still smouldering on!

Had he been gone two minutes, or—well, none?

So may a drowning man his past descry;
Softly, yet softer falls his lullaby.
And Lethe? . . . Much may hap twixt that last sip and sigh.

Head nods. Lids droop. What then may *not* befall
In realms where nothing's four-dimensional?
Where nothing's real, yet all seems natural;
And what seems ages is no time at all?

Even the Sycamore with her thousand keys
Could not force locks as intricate as these,
Nor Argus ravel out such mysteries.

So, wake to sleep; and sleep to wake we stray;
'And genius early treads the two-fold way:—

*Sun in the willow trees, Avon's placid stream:
And there, a Child, caught up 'twixt wake and dream:*

*Learning, with words, two wonders to condense—
A marvellous music, and a matchless sense.*

Say that this came of the air—what matter that?
Desert, or tarn? Rocks where the Sirens meet?
Between the stars? Or where the Nameless sit?
Or wrenched from adversity?—It's no less sweet.
It cannot be gotten for gold, nor is silver the price of it.

Ideas thus pent may like bright diamonds be,
Of a scarce-earthly diuturnity,
Their facets drenched with light's transparency
Of every hue we in the rainbow see:
Yet each gem single in its unity.

Alas, ev'n these too must
Of Wisdom itself be but the crystalline dust:
Their archetypes the Immortals have in trust.

Friends have these ever been of Poetry's.
Unlike the plant called 'everlasting', this,
Never straw-dry, sapless, or sterile is;
And since its virtue in the simple lies,
The unlearned may share its essence with the wise.

Vision and reverie, fantasies, ecstacies,
No hours 'keep' they, when, ranging as they please,

Over the hills we fare . . . over the seas . . .
Senses celestial, mind's antipodes,
Nought Reason can invoke, or Logic seize;
No chime but sea-bell's dallying in the breeze:
To where the sovereign Muses dwell—the *Hesperides*.

And any mortal whom They shall enchant
Their happy secret myrtle groves may haunt;
Nor Time, nor Age, nor Death the soul to daunt . . .

But reef your sails upon the Sea called Dead:
Quicksands where *Ennui* skulks; and, visage dread,
Dumb *Accidie* awaits you, heavy as lead:
Salt-marsh, blind wilderness, and skies blood-red;
Your horologe a vulture overhead . . .

When Dürer, rapt in *Melencolia* sat,
Did ladder, rainbow, the disconsolate,
The child no voice could rouse, no sleep could sate,
In that unfathomable silence prate
Of *time*? . . . Did bat squeak, 'Albrecht Dürer, it grows
late!'

Only the soul these symbols could portray—
That comet-stricken sea, those flames at play,
Midnight, bell, hound asleep; and—turned away—
That face, of woe and speechless grief the prey.
Timeless, in torpor of Despair are they.

Yet, while we gaze, a rapture is achieved,
As in the hush when music is conceived;

Its very beauty mourns it is bereaved:
Is grieved
The embrace that gave it birth can never be retrieved.

All things—by sorrow and truth thus tintured even,
And so transfigured—this rare grace are given;
From life's poor temporal deceits are shriven . . .

Even a drug may thus delude and cheat—
One word, 'assassin', is a proof of it.
Muffle your brain with hashish: and the beat
Of clock falls slow as echo in the night
In some primaevael cavern hidden from sight—
Stalactite whispering to stalagmite.

Hues as of Ishtar's Garden cheat the eye.
 Into the distance slips the inert, near by;
 The far recedes into infinity.
 And—if it listen—ear will magnify
 The querk of cock to Roc's appalling cry.

Or dare those deserts where no zephyr stirs,
And coins gleam on, which age-gone travellers
Dropped from their camel-caravans. And theirs
The dog whose tracks have stayed unblurred for years.

Come sudden danger, dread, the soul stands still;
An ice-cold vigilance freezes mind and will;
And every pulse-beat seems immeasurable.

No less intent, as the doomed Russian said,
Are they who keep appointment with the dead,
And, their last journey, towards the scaffold tread.

But would you bid Time *hasten*—race?
Then sit
In fancy again with Chloe—once-loved chit;
By the clear stream, where may-fly used to flit,
The copse of hazel and the young green wheat—

That rose-pale cheek, loose hair, and eager tongue
Sooth as a willow-wren's the leaves among;
The silence as the water rippled along.

How feveredly you watched the shadows grow
Longer and darker in the deepening glow
Of sun to set so soon. So soon . . . 'No, no!
You shall not, cannot go!

Drave the wheels heavily when last look and kiss
Left you forsaken of all earthly bliss?
A fleeting moment's paradise—then this?

The loved, the loving; idol or worshipper—
Which hated Time the most, as you sat there?
She, the so young, so heedless and so dear,
Or you who mourned her absence—she still near?

So Michael Drayton grieved; lorn, melancholy;
His mistress absent; her sweet company
Lost for a while, leaving him solitary:—

'Of every tedious hour you have made two,
'All this long winter here, by missing you:
Minutes are months, and when the hour is past,
A year is ended since the clock struck last.'

And so must once have felt the little maid,
Needling until the light began to fade,
My cross-stitch sampler-rhyme, so often read,
Words all but meaningless in her small tired head:—

*Short is our longest stay of life;
And soon its prospect ends:
Yet on that day's uncertain date
Eternity depends.*

And what—his life's loved labour at an end—
Chose Robert Burton for farewell to send
His hypochondriac votaries? This, my friend:—

'When I go musing all alone,
Thinking of divers things foreknown,
When I build castles in the air,
Void of sorrow and void of fear,
Pleasing myself with phantasms sweet,
Methinks the time runs very fleet.

All my joys to this are folly,
Naught so sweet as melancholy.

'When I lie waking all alone,
Recounting what I have ill done,

My thoughts on me then tyrannize,
Fear and sorrow me surprise,
Whether I tarry still or go,
Methinks the time moves very slow.

All my griefs to this are jolly,
Naught so sad as melancholy . . .

See that small bird—sand, water, groundsel, seed—
How tender seems its captor to its need.
Yet may its prisoned heart for freedom plead.

As may one's own—this *Cage* that we are in—
Dangling in Time, though Time itself's unseen,
If the beyond-it is our true demesne,
Alike its issue, and its origin.

Queer are its inmates. Though brief age they attain,
They cackle, argue, imprecate, complain—
As though some Moloch 'kept' them, for pure gain!

Whether we mope or warble, soon learn we
Mood, mind, and clock were ever at enmity.
What truth one tells the others falsify—
Prolong our griefs, give pleasure wings to fly.

If, then, Time Present goes so often awry,
Where seek the skill to judge the Future by?—

That void pretentious region where no time is,
Only incessant possibilities,

Haunting and sweet-sick half-expectancies,
Flowers of envy, desires and reveries
Which may fall sterile, or fruit quite contrariwise.

Yet—daring its vast vague uncertainty,
Defying chance, and blind fatality,
Man's noblest acts and works achieve did he.
All was 'imagined' ere it came to be;

That marvellous coral in Time's unstable sea:—
Wells, Ely, Fountains, Gloucester, Lincoln, Canterbury.

But cheating mirage, too, when most serene,
The Future's ever been—
An Ocean, as it were from cockboat seen;
With in-shore drifts of islets witching-green.

'Golden', or 'grim', or 'menacing'—in a trice
We paint the ineffable figment of its skies—
And are in Purgatory, or Paradise.

And every 'moment' we thus waste or spend,
Waiting on what we cannot comprehend,
Has it for sequel; and, no less, for end.

Day-dream, and night-, may richest pasture be—
There strays the Unicorn called Fantasy.
But why become so readily the prey—
Clean contrary to true sagacity—
Of spurious futures we shall never see?
How seldom foresight and the facts agree!

Plague on the blank forebodings, heart-ache, dole,
The grim chimæras which our wits cajole,
The signs and omens that never reach their goal;

The fears, the follies hung upon an 'If'! . . .
Surely, of foes to peace, joy, love, belief,
Is not this Time Apocryphal the chief?

In mien how soused in guile. No hairspring *he*,
Buzzing brisk seconds busier than a bee.
He *glides*. . . . As stealthily and remorselessly
As did the Serpent to Eve's apple-tree.

'Time' sheened the splendour that was Absalom's hair;
Time stilled the Garden; seduced Judas there;
Sped the avenging blade for Robespierre;
Dogged Marx, in reverie drowned, through Bloomsbury
Square.

Give Ruin room, Time cries, my brother, Space!
Whether Man win to glory or disgrace,
Things still corrupt, corrode, and leave no trace.

And with its aether-silent, deadening flood,
Which robs the unfolding flower of its bud,
Time cheats us of our loveliest for good.

All is in flux, the coming and the gone.
This massive globe rotates, zone on to zone;
5.59 at B at C's 6.1;
Its every sunrise leaves a day just done;
So, bland automaton, it circles on.

Cowed by the spectre which 'for no man waits',
Obsequious hireling of the witless Fates,
Time pins down ev'n Dictators to their 'dates'.

Still, *if* it's 'time' alone we hold in fee,
Why, load its every rift with ore, *pardie!*
At least be lively Ephemeridae.

Else, days may rot, like apples in the grass,
Sick worthless windfalls, once good fruit, alas,
Which even rooting pigs unheeded pass.

Now—with its whole penumbra, clear to dim,
Abject with misery or with bliss a-brim—
Is our Sun's universe, to its utmost rim.

We know no other's 'now', though guess we may—
And in that guessing while our own away;
And 'nows' innumerable make up our 'day':

Beads, baubles, gems, strung close; and we the string;
Each one a reflex of the everything
Around it. As may rain-drop mirror Spring;
Or foxed old hand-glass, Winter, on the wing.

And with each *Now* a rivulet runs to waste,
Unless we pause to stoop; to sip; to taste;
And muse on any reflex it may cast:

Its source a region of mountains, east to west,
High snows, crag, valleys green, and sunken fens—
a region called the Past.

Elusive Memory's concealed demesne
Wherein all relics of the Once-has-been
In viewless treasury unchanged remain.
And yet a livelong novelty retain.
Breathe *Sesame!* and make it yours again.

With caution, lest ajar the door she set
Where lurks the half-conscious one had best forget.
Vast is her cellarage. Beware of it.
Only the winds of heaven can keep it sweet.

Ah, wastrel, Memory. Hear her laugh—or weep;
Casual, erratic; and how fond of sleep;
Life's league-wide cornfields—and one sickle, to reap!

Lift up thy face, thy guileless face, my child!
The grey beard wagged; the dim, bleached, blue eyes smiled:
I am the Past. And thou, Time undefiled.

There, for the while, may silent phantoms tread,
Vivid with light and life, though long since dead;
With whom we commune, yet not one word said. . . .

I see a low square house. It's dusk. Within,
Half-crazed with dread as shades of night begin,
I stand in watch: and so for hours have been.

Behind me voices drone, where sit at tea
My guardians, mindless of my misery:
'A silly homesick child! All fiddlededee!'

Footsteps approach; pass by. And still not She.

Could she forget? Not care? Forbear to come?
Illness? Ev'n death? Alas. My heart falls numb.
Gone then for ever—mother, peace, and home . . .

So, in a flash, my heaped-up years I span
To fill *this* Now, as, with uplifted pen,
I match that child with this scarce-changed old man;

Espy, as then, along its close-shorn edge
The longed-for bonnet top the hated hedge:
Anguish to joy—how brief that slender bridge.

Isles in oblivion such scenes remain;
Poignant and vivid and passionate. And then
Life's piecemeal picture-book shuts-to again.

Oh, for pure attar, for one drop of TIME—
Essence Hesperidean of morning-prime;
How lustrously would it enrich this rhyme.

What gem would it resemble? Brilliance? Hue?
What, if—like *Ægypt's* pearl—dissolved in dew,
It lay on the tongue, then swept the whole self through?

But where's the Druggist with his Bottles three—
'*Time dead and gone*', '*Time Now*', '*Time soon to be*,

For use in any grave emergency?’
What is his price *per minim*?

Search, and see!

From London’s swarm of clocks—Bow’s to Big Ben—
Our darting eyes extort ‘the’ time. And then,
Back to the day’s routine we turn again.

In much that matters most whole centuries slow,
Lashed to its creaking treadmill on we go;
Its inmost purpose past our wits to know.

Cribbed in by diaries, with their fume and fret;
Chained to an almanac, lest we forget
To tell the Moon when she must rise and set;

Mock-solemn creatures, with our jackdaw airs,
Our Loans, Exchanges, Markets, stocks and shares,
And—squinting two-faced monsters—Bulls-and-Bears;
Boredom and bankruptcy our recurrent cares;
And Nobody, poor souls, to hear our prayers:

How *thus* win liberty? How thus to come,
With these poor fractions, to a sovereign sum?
Ensure ourselves our own continuum?
Dance with the stars in their choragium?

Ring the bells backwards! Ay, no pause; no ease!
There looms on high, the Sword of Damocles,
Dangling by hair now hoar as Destiny’s
Over the labyrinth of days, like these.

Tyrannies deadlier than of Syracuse
Slowly insidiously undermining us—
The heart’s debasement, and the mind’s misuse.

Man gone, his clocks gone, *Time* might fall asleep?
A halcyon brooding on the Pacific Deep;
That huge, slow swell—sans wrack or sign of ship—
Which from the heavens seems scarcely even to creep. . .

ONCE

'Once', runs the tale, 'in the lost isle of Lyncke,
A Cat, long poised on Instinct's very brink,
Crossed it by chance: and found that she could think.

'No previous venture could her feat excel.
At one swift leap she'd borne away the bell;
Pouncing on notions past all count to tell,
Quick as a kitten with a ball of wool.

'High in her Monarch's kitchen, snug on shelf,
Half-hidd'n by ancient pots resembling Delf,
She'd sit, for hours, colloquing with herself.

'Motionless eyes upon the scene below—
Jars, bowls, pots, platters, dishes, stew-pans in a row;
All creature comforts man and feline know,

'Cream by the gallon, a ceaseless to and fro,
Copper, brass, crystal, silver, twinkling and a-glow,
Scullions a score, and Cook in cap of snow—
Her thoughts welled on. And all were apropos.

'Logic for Law, she ranged from A. to Z.,
Never deluding her now brass-bright head,
By speculation, or mere fancy led,

With chance-wise ray that might on it be shed
Had she roved off at *N.*, *Q.*, *X.*, instead.

'She mused on Space and Time, on Mind and Brain;
The 'isms and 'ologies that to them pertain;
On Will, Fate, Fortune: then turned back again
To dredge what in her Unconscious might remain
And purged its sediment of the faintest stain . . .

'She sniffed at ideologies—was sick;
Pondered on 'policy' and 'politic'—
Yawned, and enwreathed her chops with one long lick.

'Once, ev'n, ejecting a contemptuous look
Down on the Scene below, a vow she took
She'd some day learn these Humans how to cook.

'And so, alack, the years thus spent
Failed to benumb her with sublime content.
A mewling voice kept nagging vague dissent:
"*What, now they're over, ma'am, precisely have they meant?*
Are you the wiser for this banishment?"—

'And all those vats of choicest knowledge hers!
The mischief done by inward Whisperers! . . .
Dead-weary of her Past (the tale avers)
And even of the great philosophers,

'She supped: on tipsy-cake, to be precise;
Re-crossed her Rubicon; and, in a trice,
Resumed her sport of catching rats and mice:
Then slept; and dreamed; and slept. 'Twas paradise.

'Then, winter come; and snow; and wassailing;
-Crouched on the Jester's knee, she'd purr, (he'd sing),
-Runes strange and secret upon Everything,
Gazing meanwhile intently at the King . . . '

'Ah, had she learned to swim; to sail a boat;
Tread water—anything to keep afloat,
She might have reached the Mainland—though remote;
Been broken in to live by rule and rote;
Timed, taped, stampeded by the siren's hoot.

'No; old yet wise, and come to where she'd be,
Throughout Life IX all tranquilly lived she—
"Puss by Appointment to His Majesty". . . '

'Breakfast at eight.' *'Adjourned till April 2.'*

'Au revoir.' *'No flowers.'* *'Of a son.'* *'Na-poo!'*—

-Thus Man clocks in, clocks out, his whole life through.

His Struldbrugg *Father Time*—starved, bald, and daft,
Must limned have been—scythe, hour-glass, fore and aft—
By him who blinded Eros; and then laughed.

Emblems like this were cuts on every page
In Abel's hornbook—Adam's heritage: ✍
They'll serve, perhaps, until Man comes of age.

Meanwhile we grope—as might the withy-wind
Striving around the ecliptic to be entwined.
Clocks 'right', but differing, found us still resigned,
Till, seventy years ago, we changed our mind:
And Act of Parliament *the* 'time' defined.

Yet once, the kings being gone, as Scripture tells,
Heaven's host now silent, star-shine on the hills,
Came, with his coral and its silver bells,

To lull both Mother and Son to their first sleep—
Safe, for the while, in stable with the sheep,
Nor any carking Cross wherefore to weep—

None else but *Time* himself: once more a child;
The youngest of the Cherubs, and less wild;
Hawk paired with turtle-dove, and reconciled.

So still he sate, being both young and wise—
Poised on the verge 'twixt two eternities—
Beauty itself he seemed, in earthly guise;
And daybreak-blue the colour of his eyes

To me, one cracked old dial is most dear;
My boyhood's go-to-bed, its Chanticleer;
Whose tick, alas, no more enchants my ear.

Dumb on the wall it hangs, its hands at noon;
Its face as vacant as a full-blown moon;
The mainspring broken, and its wheels run down—

A kitchen chattel. No fit theme for rhyme;
That case encrusted with a century's grime.
And yet, it taught me 'how to tell the time'.

I knew a bank. . . . Ah, then was Time indeed.
Ere life's first buds had bloomed, and gone to seed—
And none unloved; least so, the lowliest weed.

Harebell, moss, pimpernel; a swift in flight;
The star of evening on the verge of night—
One's heart stood still for wonder and delight:

And in that pause to a far island came
Of strangest semblance, and without a name;
For ever changing, and yet still the same.

Flame was its beauty, and the sea its bliss;
Its every sound a secret music. Yes,
An island such as in *The Tempest* is—

Imaged in words, but Thulé of a mind,
Not only Shakespeare's, but of all mankind:
That which blest Poetry alone can find . . .

'What *is* this Poetry,' self whispered self,
'But the endeavour, faithfully and well
As speech in language man-devised can,
To enshrine therein the inexpressible?

'See, now, the moon's declining crescent slim;
Thridding the stars in heaven she goes her way:
Yet doth she silver-tinge the virgin white
Of that clear cluster of jasmine on its spray.

'Ay, and my cheek her finger touched. I turned,
Through window scanned the seed-plot I could till,
And called a garden: and my heart stopped beating,
So marvellous its darkness, and so still'

Ours is that wine; that water clear and cool;
That very vineyard; and the troubled pool;
Wherewith to fill the thirsting spirit full.

Our utmost reach is what their content seems;
What mind surmises, and the heart esteems—
Ev'n though it be as transient as our dreams.

The true, the guileless, meaningful, and fair
Rest for their essence on our heed and care;
These are Earth's everything, Heaven's everywhere,
However small the commons we ourselves may share

